

## UNICEF Report February 2021

Over the past six months, UNICEF, and its partners across the Pacific, have been actively engaged with the strategic program planning for the *Rotary Give Every Child A Future* (RGEAF) project. Generations will continue to benefit from this project and UNICEF would like to thank all Rotarians for their ongoing support and we are pleased to share the latest updates on the program's progress.

As with most activities and initiatives planned for 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on program delivery timeframes. Whilst none of the nine countries involved in the program reported any cases of COVID-19, border closures, flights reductions and import restrictions across the Pacific region have resulted in delays to some of the planned activities and project targets for the year. The pandemic has been a focus area for Ministries of Health over the last twelve months, and the continuation of essential health services through the emergency has been the main priority for the countries. Immunisation rates have gone down across the Pacific due to COVID-19, and UNICEF has been working with the Ministries to ensure that communities can still be reached by these services.

In addition to COVID-19, over the past two months Fiji has been hit by two tropical cyclones which have affected more than 93,000 people, including 32,500 children and UNICEF has been on the ground supporting communities. These crises have impacted the movement of people and supplies; however, we are pleased to report that significant program progress has still been achieved during these challenging times. A key element of the RGECAF program is focused on strengthening the Pacific's broader health systems to ensure the sustainable delivery of vaccines into the future. This is now critically important as we face the biggest health crisis of our generation and this program will undoubtedly assist in preparations for the important roll out of the COVID-19 vaccine in the Pacific.

Logistical preparation has been tracking well, and major milestones have been achieved with the vaccines and cold chain distribution equipment both procured and making their way to their eventual destinations. The first batches of the three vaccines have arrived in Fiji and will be sent from there to the nine countries as soon as current flight and freight constraints allow, whilst the cold chain equipment has been received in each of the countries.




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*A health worker in Samoa proudly displays vaccine ice lined refrigerators funded by Rotary that will store vaccines waiting shipment to Tokelau. It is critical that vaccines are stored at a controlled temperature so that they retain their potency, and refrigerators are an integral link in the vaccination cold chain. © UNICEF*

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Elsewhere we are making strong progress with training mechanisms and monitoring and evaluation processes in collaboration with key government stakeholders, and in accordance with the RGECAF strategic program plan.

UNICEF is in the final stages of developing a vaccination health worker training program, which will be adapted for each country, and is expected to be rolled out in the months following development.

Significantly, this training will encompass several similar elements to the COVID vaccination training (e.g., injection safety, cold-chain requirements, storage and handling principles for various delivery contexts, waste disposal), which will reinforce knowledge and quality throughout local health networks.

The Effective Vaccine Management assessments for each country are underway, which will help the countries evaluate the current performance of their vaccine management practices against a benchmark of performance standards. A rapid formative assessment is underway to inform demand creation for the vaccines, tailored for each country. The data collected in the assessments will guide the recommendations for each country's Communication for Development Strategy, developed in collaboration with the Ministries of Health, and social mobilisation strategies designed to encourage caregivers to bring their children for vaccines. These reports will also be used to inform the introduction of the COVID-19 vaccine in each country.

Vaccinating their populations against COVID-19, and the planning and implementation of coronavirus vaccinations is a current critical focus for the Pacific countries, and the timing expectation for the first rotavirus, HPV and PCV vaccinations in each country is highly dependent on the roll-out of COVID-19 vaccines. Whilst we await confirmation of the start date for vaccinations, UNICEF is using this time to prepare for the introduction of the new vaccines and lay the groundwork to ensure a speedy and smooth implementation as soon as the first vaccinations can commence.

We are extremely encouraged by the progress that has been made to date, and we are inspired by the scale, value, and significance of this program evident in its contribution to the countries' COVID-19 vaccination response. The RGECAF project is showing impact on health systems across the Pacific and UNICEF, before the vaccinations have even started, would like to wholeheartedly express its gratitude to all Rotarians involved in funding this program, which would not be possible without your contributions. We look forward to sharing further updates with you in the months and years to come.



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*Expanded Programme on Immunisation Manager Asena Kauyaca proudly displays cold chain vaccine carriers procured for Tokelau, where Rotary is funding the introduction of rotavirus, HPV and PCV vaccinations for school-age children. © UNICEF*

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